

5 Keys to Playing College Baseball

by Wayne Mazzoni



1. Be skilled. As silly as it sounds, you need to be an elite athlete to play any level of college baseball, much less obtain a Division I scholarship. Infielders need quick movements, soft hands and strong arms. While it helps if you can make the flashy plays, the fact is college coaches want you to make all the routine plays first. Outfielders need speed, strong arms, and either be base stealers or power hitters. College outfields are generally much bigger than high school fields and thus an outfielder that can run and cover ground brings a lot to the table. Catchers need to receive properly and always remember the main job is to make the marginal ball look like a strike. They also need to not only block well, but keep the ball close by so extra bases aren't given up so easily. Lastly, they need to throw well, not just have a big power arm, but have great feet and a quick release. If they are able to take charge of pitchers and lead a team, then their value goes way up. Pitchers must throw strikes, have some movement, locate, have velocity and secondary pitches. But more importantly, they need what I call the "it" factor. That is, they always want the ball, never want to come out of a game, always pound the strike zone, field the position, control the runners and just have an awareness on the mound. Hitters use their lower half well, drive the ball, be able to bunt (a huge skill in college, especially with the BBCOR bats). As a hitter you also need to be able to get yourself to second base. That means bunt or hit and get on first, then steal second. If you are not a runner, then you need to be able to hit doubles. Singles hitters, unless you hit a ton of them (high 300's) are not as valuable as someone who can drive the ball and/or run. Nothing can take the place of skill and having all of the items below without the skill, won't get you anywhere.



2. Be strong and in shape. Having all the skill in the world is great, but without the strength, speed, and explosion, you will have a hard time getting the attention of college coaches. You can have the best swing, pitching mechanics, etc., but if you don't have the body behind it, it just does not translate to the next level. You should be on a college level lifting program. The purpose of this, first and foremost, is to keep you healthy and on the field. You can't help the club in the tub. But more so, you want to be ready to last for a whole college season. So building a good foundation in the off-season and maintaining that through the season is important. Fact is, those players at the college level that are the strongest, really do win out in the long run.

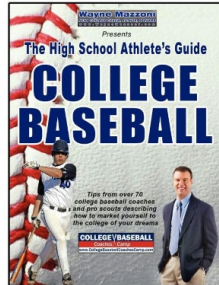


3. Academics. I am sure you have all heard enough that grades matter at the college level. Of course they do and college coaches care so that we can get you in to our schools. But more importantly you need to have the type of track record on the academic side so that we don't have to worry about you once you get to college. Freshman year can be tough. On your own, managing baseball, social life, and the classroom can be tough. So unless you have set up a good track record as a student, college can be tough. Let's also be honest. If you throw the ball 92 miles an hour, some top program is going to want you and will put up with helping you every step of the way to keep you eligible. But most programs don't operate that way. While colleges have lots of resources (study hall, tutors, academic coordinators, etc), the fact is, if we are looking at two infielders, both similar on the field, one has his academic life in order, the other does not, who would you take?



4. Attitude. Simple. What is your work ethic? What are your habits? How do you handle adversity? Bottom line if you aren't where you need to be with your mental game, and your life, now is the time to make change. If I had to place one reason why two freshmen will come into a program and two years later one is making an impact, the other is not, it would fall on this area. Fact is, the road to being an

impact player is not easy, there are always going to be roadblocks. Those that can handle them, work through them, get motivated rather than defeated by them, are the ones who will achieve on the field and often manage life after college the best.



5. Recruiting Knowledge. You need to understand what to do in the recruiting process. To boil down a very involved process it comes down to this: 1) Picking the right schools for you based on baseball, academics, and your personal likes and dislikes about colleges. 2) Knowing what to do to get evaluated by the coaches at these schools. They won't all want you, but what you need is a clear cut answer. If they don't want you, move on. If they do, time to 3) Kick the tires at each school. Meaning what will life really be like on the field, in the classroom, in the dorms, socially, can you get accepted, afford it, etc.

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